

IN SEARCH OF PLEASURE:
AN EXPLORATION OF TEENAGE RECREATIONAL SEX

A Thesis

by

LAUREN ELIZABETH REICHSTEIN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

December 2011

Major Subject: Recreation, Park and Tourism Science

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Chair of Committee,	Corliss Outley
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ABSTRACT

In Search of Pleasure: An Exploration of Teenage Recreational Sex. (December 2011)

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Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Corliss Outley

This thesis utilizes a qualitative method to investigate recreational sex among teenagers as recounted by current college-aged students. As defined for the purposes of this thesis, recreational sex is any consensual sexual activity undertaken for the purpose of pleasure and can encompass a variety of sexual activities. Questions were focused on attitudes and feelings about experiences and were formulated based on reminiscence methods. Studies that discuss teen sexuality in terms of pleasure are important for acknowledging sexual agency and self-efficacy among teens and for addressing the inherent risk involved in sexual activity.

The first part of this thesis focuses on recreational sex in a more traditional recreational context. In other words, how do teens discuss and view recreation and recreational sex? Findings suggest that it is often hard to define sexual activity in terms usually associated with other recreational activities but that there are parallels upon further discussion. In addition, partners, past experience, and use of contraception play a role in shaping current experiences.

The second part of this thesis examines the gendered contexts of teenage sexual pleasure. Findings show that the pursuance of pleasure is problematic for females in the

same way that other sexual activities are. Participants suggest that sexual pleasure is assumed for males but criticized for females and that females often must negotiate the social landscape carefully to project a particular desirable image. In addition, many female participants described being the victims of sexual assault as part of their sexual experiences.

Taken together, these pieces provide a contextual picture of teenage recreational sex. Rather than investigate more traditional aspects of teen sexual behavior (i.e. contraception, alcohol and drug use), this thesis approaches sexual activity in terms of pleasure. This gives credence to the idea that teens not only experience sexual pleasure but also that they actively seek it.

DEDICATION

To my family for their support.

They did not always understand but they always believed.

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There are many people who have contributed to this process. First and foremost, I need to thank my advisor Dr. Corliss Outley. I could not have done this without her guidance, enthusiasm, and support. She never once thought that this was an unapproachable topic and always offered constructive advice and help especially during the days leading to my defense. Her father passed during those last days, and she, despite having other things on her mind, still offered critiques and support. I cannot thank her enough.

Dr. Rudy Dunlap has also been a source of guidance and knowledge. He also was enthusiastic about this project from the beginning and offered invaluable insight to the connection between recreation and sexual activity, even when it was not so clear to me. I am not sure this would have made so much sense without his input into both the recreation connection and the methodology.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Teenage sexual activity has been a major concern of modern society and youth researchers and practitioners, yet statistics show that teenagers are waiting longer to have sex (Guttmacher Institute, 2010) and that the percentage of high school students engaging in sexual intercourse at least once has dropped since 1993 (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005). Several scholars have indicated that early sexual intercourse is predicted by factors such as perception of gender roles (Impett, Schoolar and Tolman, 2006), religiosity (Woodruff, 1986), socioeconomic status, and general access to social resources (Crosby, Holtgrave, DiClemente, Wingood, & Gayle, 2003; Miller, 2002). In addition, Cooper (2002) found that the use of alcohol, drugs, and other substances predicted risky sexual behavior including engagement in casual sexual behaviors.

However, some researchers have asserted that the best predictor of teen sexual behavior is desire for physical pleasure (Levinson, Jaccard, & Beamer, 1994), and many cited physical pleasure as one reason to engage in sexual activities (Bay-Cheng, Robinson, & Zucker, 2009; Dawson, Shih, de Moor, & Shrier, 2008). Still, much of the literature on teenage sexuality is focused on risk behaviors, use of contraception, perceived risk of contracting Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) (Rosengard, Adler & Millstein, 2004), and influence of alcohol or drugs (Cooper, 2002). In addition, research often focuses on preventing and dissuading youth from engaging in sexual

This thesis follows the style of the *Journal of Leisure Research*.

activities. In contrast, this study focuses on pleasure as a motivation for engaging in sexual activity, and sexual activity as a valid recreational activity; that is, sex for the sake of sex.

The role of pleasure in sex is well documented in the literature. Leigh (1989) identified six possible reasons to engage in sexual activity, and Hill and Preston (1996) identified eight. Both classification systems listed pleasure as a reason to engage in sex. Meston and Buss (2007) conducted a survey and identified by gender the 50 top reasons that participants claimed to have sexual encounters. Of those, many were related to pleasure. For example, both male and female participants noted that they might have sex “because they were horny,” or “sexually aroused,” “wanted the pure pleasure” or “to achieve an orgasm” among others (p. 481).

Similarly, in the field of leisure studies, the pursuit of an activity for the sake of enjoyment, and pleasure, has been described by many scholars as recreation. Recreation can be defined as “the voluntary participation in leisure activities that are meaningful and enjoyable to the person involved” (Cordes & Ibrahim, 1999, p. 7). As cited above, people often participate in sexual activities because they are enjoyable. Herold and Mewhinney (1993) identified sex as an integral part of a fulfilling life, and previously cited authors (Hill & Preston, 1996; Leigh, 1989; Meston & Bus, 2007) identified many meaningful interpersonal reasons for having sex, including feeling close to a partner, pleasing a partner, or solidifying a relationship.

Yet, in youth development, there is often the assumption that teens should *not be engaging* in sexual activity. It is often the goal of various groups to *prevent* such activity

Abstaining from sexual activity is considered an asset by the Search Institute (2006) which developed a list of 40 Developmental Assets for emerging adults. These assets are considered by many to be paramount for youth to develop into productive, well-adjusted adults. Despite this, there is a growing number of researchers promoting sexual self-efficacy and agency for teens. Promoting the prevention of sexual activity while devaluing youth beliefs and feelings about sexual desire and pleasure are contradicting ideas, especially considering the rise in popularity of youth self-determination. Sexual pleasure is seen as inherently important in adult relationships and as an aspect of adult health. Yet, this same idea is discounted for youth because of the perceived inability to handle sexual situations, despite the fact that young bodies are sexually mature at the start of puberty.. This distinction is critical for practitioners who aim to prepare youth for adulthood. Just because we do not view young adults as sexual beings does not mean that they are not engaging in sexual behaviors and that they will not do so as adults. Prevention neither adequately prepares adolescents for the realities of sexual activity nor does it prepare them for adult sexual lives.

Purpose of the Study

Despite multiple studies that have shown that teens engage in sex (casual or otherwise) for pleasure, there has been little to no research done in the context of recreational sex for many of the reasons outlined above. This study has several aims:

- 1) To document the perceptions of sex as recreation among teenagers,***
- 2) To document contextual circumstances associated with recreational sex behavior among teenagers, and***

3) To document the gendered meanings of recreational sex practices.

Based on these aims, the following questions assist in guiding the study: *How do youth think about and interpret sexual pleasure? What are the specific circumstances surrounding recreational sexual encounters? Does recreational sex have to include emotional involvement? Is there a meaningful difference between the ideas of recreational sex, hooking-up, friends with benefits, and casual sexual relationships? Is it possible to have sex where recreation is just one factor? If so, are these sexual encounters viewed differently between genders?*

Definitions

For the purposes of this research, I offer the following definitions:

- 1) Recreational sex: Any consensual sexual activity undertaken for pleasure.
Activities can include (but are not limited to) kissing, masturbation, oral or manual fondling, use of toys, and/or penetration of either the anus or vagina. Any of these activities can take place between males, females, mixed genders, or alone and can take place in the context of a committed romantic relationship, as a one-time sexual encounter, or as part of a friendship with sexual activity.
- 2) Recreation: although there is much debate over the use of the term recreation, this thesis uses the definition offered by Cordes and Ibrahim (1999): The pursuance of an activity for its own sake.
- 3) Sex: Any activity which involves sexual arousal such as kissing, oral or manual stimulation, and/or penetration of the anus or vagina.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis follows an article format. Chapter I introduces background information on teenage sexuality, the statement of the problem, and definitions associated with the research study. Chapter II (Manuscript #1) and Chapter III (Manuscript #2) are manuscripts that present methodologies used, analysis of the data, study findings, implications for practice, and avenues for future potential research. Manuscript #1 presents information regarding attitudes and contexts of teenage recreational sexual behavior. Manuscript #2 focuses on gendered meanings of sexual pleasure as observed by participants. Chapter IV offers general conclusions for both articles presented in this thesis.

CHAPTER II

'A LOT OF EXCITEMENT': EXPLORING TEENAGE RECREATIONAL SEX AND PLEASURE

Teenage sexual behavior is a controversial topic. Many believe that teenagers should abstain from sexual behavior to mitigate threats such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy. However, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2010), 34.2% of high school-aged teens are currently sexually active (defined as having sexual intercourse within 3 months of the survey), a statistic which does not include activities such as oral sex, anal sex, or heavy petting. Of those who were sexually active, 61% used a condom last time they had intercourse, 22.4% used hormone-based birth control (either the Pill or Depoprovera), and 8.9% used both. In addition, 21% of sexually active teens used alcohol or illegal drugs before the most recent time they had sexual intercourse. These numbers assume, of course, that teens are honestly self-reporting their rates of sexual activity. These findings are made more significant when considering the Association of Social Health in America's (2005) statistic that states one out of every two sexually active persons from the ages of 15 to 24 will contract an STI in their lifetime and that "half of all new HIV infections occur in adolescents" (p. 2).

Because of statistics such as these, there has been much research conducted on teenage sexuality, particularly as it relates to STIs and pregnancy prevention (Levinson, Jaccard, & Beamer, 1995). Despite the heavy focus on teenage sexual behavior and

motivations, there has been relatively little attention paid to sexual pleasure and desire, even though these are cited in various forms as high predictors of teen sexual activity (e.g. Finer, 2007; Meston & Buss, 2007). Moreover, teen sexual activity is rarely researched as a conscious decision made by teenage individuals who wish to pursue activities which relate to sexual desire and pleasure. More often, studies highlight either prevention (for reasons detailed above) or specific contexts of sexual activity (partners, alcohol and drug use, use of contraception, etc.). In contrast, this study focuses on the idea of sex as recreation and on teenagers who pursue sexual activity for its own sake.

Literature Review

The Context of Teen Sexual Behaviors

Given the statistics presented in the previous section, many researchers are interested in the structure of sexual relationships among teens and in general teen sexual behaviors. However, there has been much variation in the ways in which researchers study and discuss teenage sexual behaviors, casual sex, and relationships, leading to some confusion among both academics and teens.

In 1991, Rosenthal, Moore, and Flynn found that teens in a romantic relationship had sex for different reasons than teens who were not in a romantic relationship. Expanding on this, Rosengard, Adler and Millstein (2004) found that teenagers were willing to engage in sex with casual partners sooner than with romantic ones. Despite popular belief that teenagers who engage in casual sex are indiscriminately choosing little known partners, research indicates that teenagers more often engage in casual sexual behaviors with those whom they know (Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2006).

In fact, non-monogamous relationships are more common now than they have previously been, as are sexual relationships with those who are seen as close friends or acquaintances.

According to Manning, Giordano, and Longmore (2006), most research does not discern casual sexual relationships from romantic ones, and studies that do are focused on disease and pregnancy prevention, rather than on the psychosocial motivations to engage in certain behaviors and the results of those behaviors. In addition, most of the research which does define casual sexual behaviors does so in a problematic or contradicting way. Rosengard, Adler, and Millstein (2004) defined a casual sex partner as “anyone that you have sex with but do not consider this person to be a main partner to you,” while Rosenthal, Moore, and Flynn (1991) defined a casual sexual partner as a sexual partner not considered to be a main partner and a regular sexual partner as “someone with whom you have an exclusive sexual relationship” (p. 80). Paul, McManus and Hayes (2000) noted that casual sex is used in many different contexts and that many of them did not include intercourse. When casual sex is explicitly defined, it is often as a subset of casual sexual behaviors such as hooking up, friends-with-benefits, and one-night stands. (Fortunato, Young, Boyd, & Fons, 2010). Many authors focus on variables such as length between meeting partners and engaging in casual sexual behavior, settings which might facilitate casual sexual behavior, and gender differences for participation in casual sexual activities (Weaver & Herold, 2000).

Consistent with ambiguous classifications and definitions, Fortunato, et. al. (2010), noted that “the act of hooking-up is most similar to what has previously been

referred to as ‘casual sex,’ in that both terms describe sexual encounters among acquaintances or strangers with no expectation” (p. 262), and that hooking up can be deemed a sub-category within casual sex. Young, Penhollow and Bailey (2010) noted that “the general idea is a hooking-up encounter is one in which the participants are strangers, or brief acquaintances, who participate in sexual activity with little or no expectation of a future relationship” (p. 156). While these definitions all hit some of the same points, the most comprehensive is that used by Paul and Hayes (2002). They stated that, “a hook-up is defined herein as a sexual encounter (that may or may not involve sexual intercourse) between two people who are brief acquaintances or strangers usually lasting only one night without the expectation of developing a relationship” (p. 640).

Friends with benefits is a similar term used to describe some sexual relationships, in which participants theoretically have no expectation of a romantic relationship but engage in sexual activities. Owen and Fincham (2011) defined a friend with benefits as one with whom there might be a physical component without commitment or a long-term relationship. Many authors have cited friends-with-benefits as a sexual relationship without the context of romantic involvement (Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2005). Bisson and Levine (2009) found that around 60% of those surveyed had engaged in a friends-with-benefits relationship, and 61.8% believed that it is possible to engage in sexual activities with someone while maintaining an otherwise platonic friendship.

These terms illustrate part of the teenage sexual landscape. Adolescents no longer engage in sexual relationships with only romantic partners. In fact, they often prefer to participate in sexual activity *without* the commitment of a relationship. It is

possible that this predisposes teens to engage in recreational sex and to seek sexual pleasure.

Defining 'Sex'

It is possible that the difficulty in defining sexual relationships is related to the difficulty researchers have in agreeing on a conceptual definition for “sex”. For example, Eshbaugh and Gute (2008) studied hook-ups and regret among college women but only asked questions related to intercourse and oral sex without mention of manual stimulation. Similarly, Manning, Giordano, and Longmore (2006) investigated many sexual behaviors of adolescents but only inquired about sexual intercourse without including other practices which might be deemed sexual. Paul and Hayes (2002) found that sexual touching and petting were common components of hook-up scripts, yet many studies do not consider this type of interaction to be sexual.

This is not surprising considering that the general adult population also does not always know how to define sex. In fact, Hans, Gillen, and Akande (2010) noted that practitioners were not consistent in how they defined terms such as sex, abstinence, and virginity. In their study, approximately 98% of participants considered penile-vaginal intercourse to be sex, 78% considered penile-anal intercourse to be sex, and only 20% considered oral or manual stimulation and touching to be sexual. Similarly, Sanders, Hill, Yarber, Graham, Crosby and Milhausen (2010) found that although vaginal intercourse was almost universally considered sexual, anal penetration and oral or manual stimulation were not considered by many to be defined as sex. In fact, some were unsure of whether penile-vaginal stimulation that did not culminate in ejaculation

inside the vagina could be defined as sex. Peterson and Muehlenhard (2007) noted that this may be because people do not generally have concrete criteria for what constitutes a sexual behavior and what does not. Gute, Eshbaugh, and Wiersma (2008) found that young adults were much more likely to label a sexually themed activity as sex if it takes place between their partners and a third party, rather than if they have participated in the activity. Interestingly, the most descriptive definition that could be found for sex (aside from genetic descriptions of gender) encompassed sexual behavior and some connection with touching genitalia (Sex, 2007). These contradictions demonstrate the possible differences in attitude and interpretations that teens have regarding sexual behavior and recreational sex. This complicates data presenting generalized teen sexual behavior. Often what researchers mean by ‘sex’ and what teens mean are different, and studies might not present accurate rates of teen sexual behavior or beliefs.

Teenage Sexual Pleasure

Throughout the literature, there has been much discourse on motivations behind sexual behavior and in particular teenage sexual behavior. Regan and Dryer (1999) suggested that there are five different categories of motives for sexual behavior, including: personal, environmental, physical, and interpersonal. Dawson, et. al. (2008) found that most teenagers who participated in sexual activity did so for multiple reasons. The most cited were “we wanted (38%), we were in love (27%), just happened (9%), and to feel good (8%)” (p. 229). Meston and Buss (2007) conducted a similar study in which participants were asked to list reasons they might engage in sexual activity. Common answers for both men and women consisted of reasons such as desire to have

an orgasm and participant was feeling sexually aroused. These studies imply that sexual pleasure is a key motivation among teenagers to engage in sexual activity.

Focusing on teenage sexual pleasure, it seems, is atypical for sex researchers, youth researchers and practitioners, and school-based sex educators alike. Authors such as Bay-Cheng (2003), Kreinin (2002) and Ingham (2005) criticized current sex education programs for nearly eliminating pleasure from the curriculum, despite information which suggests that sexual pleasure is a large motivator to sexual activity. Rather, according to Bay-Cheng (2003), School Based Sex Education (SBSE) centers on fear and morality-based teachings and specifically focuses on abstinence as the only standard for teen sexual behavior. Yet, according to Goodson, Pruitt, Suther, Wilson and Buhi (2006), this method is not theory-based and does not account for the many standards by which sexual activity is judged or the many reasons for which teens engage in sexual activity, particularly considering that teens receive messages regarding sexual activity from many different sources. These include school, the media, parents, and peers. This is why a growing number of sex researchers advocate for centering SBSE on sex-positive ideas such as pleasure, desire, and sexual self-efficacy, (Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996; Fine, 1988) or, the ability to discern personal sexual desires and to make decisions on those according to one's personal beliefs.

One notable study focuses on sexual pleasure and enjoyment as part of an assets-based approach. Galinsky and Sonenstein (2011) conducted a statistical analysis of sexual activity and enjoyment as compared to development of three assets (autonomy, self-esteem, and empathy) from the Search Institute's (2006) 40 Developmental Assets

list. Although the responses varied by gender concerning self-esteem and autonomy, development of empathy was consistent across genders, and females in particular saw a positive correlation between the development of these assets and sexual enjoyment. This indicates that although one asset specifically calls for sexual restraint, other assets can be developed in spite of and even because of sexual activity.

Sex as Recreation

Traditionally, sex, or more specifically, sexual intercourse has been viewed in a procreative manner; that is, sex is vaginal intercourse between a man and a woman for the purpose of creating new human life (Bullough, 1994; Francoeur, 2001). In a practical sense, sex for the purpose of recreation used to be nearly impossible to separate from sex for the purpose of procreation (Bammel & Burrus-Bammel, 1982). Even after the introduction and wide-spread use of hormonal birth control and condoms, many authors continued to express that while sex “can be recreational,” the most satisfying sexual experiences occur “when two people who love each other and are in love with each other express with their bodies what words can scarce convey” (Bammel & Burrus-Bammel, 1982, p.183).

More currently, authors are discussing the possibility of recreational sex independent of the context of love. According to Kelly and Freysinger (2000), “the possibility of sex for its own sake is reality” (p. 167), and in the classic definition of the word recreation (to re-create), sexual activity facilitates a participant to emerge in a renewed, satisfied state. Furthermore, they argued, like some traditional recreational

activities, sex is now being treated as a commodity and is an activity which requires “preparation, culmination, recollection” (p. 168).

Similarly, Kelly (1996) noted that for adolescents, sexual activity can be considered a form of leisure in itself and is an activity “freely chosen because it promises a high degree of satisfaction in the experience itself” (p. 390). This is an expansion on the definition of a leisure experience as an activity chosen by the participant for its intrinsic value (Neulinger, 1981); that is, sexual activity for the sake of sexual pleasure can be considered a leisure experience. However, Csikszentmihalyi and Kleiber (1992) discussed the limitations of this definition and the idea that often participants define leisure as something which would culturally be considered ‘positive’ or ‘acceptable.’ Thus, although some activities, such as watching television or engaging in sexual activity could be considered leisure by Neulinger’s definition, many would hesitate to define them as such because of the lesser value placed on those activities by society.

Godbey (2008) discussed the idea of sexual activity as play, in the form of games with established rules and consequences for breaking those rules. In particular, he highlighted several games (involving kissing) and noted that often these games function in the same way traditional play does by providing a way for teens to explore social relationships in a more informal setting. He also noted that viewing of pornography can be considered use of leisure time in a way similar to watching movies or reading books. This complimented Comfort’s (1973) assertion that sex has three roles: procreation, intimacy (relational), and physical play (recreation) and that adults have the option of pursuing all three of these options regarding sexual activity. In particular, he noted there

is the option of participating in “sex as a physical pleasure accompanied by no more than affection” (p. 30).

Although there are many definitions of recreation used in the leisure and recreation studies literature, including the one cited earlier in this thesis, some authors have suggested that involvement in leisure activities offers the benefit of pleasure and that many participants identify pleasure as an “important criteri[on]” (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997, p. 285) of their leisure experience. This compliments Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) theory of flow in which he specifically mentioned sexual behavior as “one of the first things that comes to mind” (p. 100) when discussing flow experiences. He described sex as an experience which can be “pleasurable, enjoyable, or ecstatic” (p. 101) among other things and noted that to enjoy sex one needs to be only healthy and willing to participate. This differs from many traditional recreational experiences such as sports, yoga, or reading in that many of them require a special skill set before they can be enjoyed as art of a flow experience.

Additionally, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) noted that eroticism is designed to develop physical skills related to increasing sexual pleasure, and historically, many societies have developed systems of erotic training, ostensibly, to make sex more pleasurable (and thus have more children). Similarly, Kleiber (1999) argued that development of competency and skills is a way to show serious interest in a leisure activity and that most activities which are continued into adulthood “are complex enough to provide ever-increasing levels of challenge” and “include a cohort of others with similar interests, commitments, and circumstances” (p.49). This is easily related to

sexual activity, especially when viewed in the context of special interest groups related to sexual preferences (i.e., fetishes).

As described in the above paragraphs, recreational sex differs from the sexual disorders or compulsivities that are highlighted by Bankroft and Vukadanovic (2004). They found that some men and women who are self-proclaimed sexual addicts use sexual activity as a way to dissociate themselves from reality. In addition, they offer a sexual model based on Goodman's (1997) model of sexual behavior disorders. Key aspects of these are "impaired affect regulation" and "impaired behavior inhibition" (p. 231). Although recreation is often used as an "escape", it is not accompanied by inability to control behavior.

Methodology

While there are many ways of conducting qualitative research, this particular study was designed to explore the thoughts and attitudes of participants regarding recreational sex via the use of thought-provoking questions during an in-depth interview. This is unlike similar studies which focus on pleasure. Most of these studies use surveys or structured interview formats (Owen & Fincham, 2011) that make it difficult to discern participant intent or understand complex situations. Sexual situations are often highly contextual, and this study endeavors to explore much of that context.

Sample and Recruiting

Recruiting was done using a targeted, criteria-based¹ sampling structure. Participants were initially contacted via e-mail, class announcements, and word-of-mouth and were given multiple ways of contacting researchers so as to preserve confidentiality. Potential participants were informed of the research study and asked to contact researchers if they experienced a recreational sexual encounter during their teenage years (between the ages of 12 and 18). Twelve participants, four males and eight females contacted researchers and answered questions about their teenage recreational sexual experiences in a semi-structured interview format. One female interview was excluded because the participant did not experience a recreational sexual encounter before the age of 18 years, and one male interview was not included because of a corrupt recording.

The remaining 10 participants were between the ages of 19 and 24 and represented a variety of populations. There were three self-identified Caucasians, three African Americans, one Asian, one Hispanic, one Mexican/Pakistani and one Caucasian/Vietnamese. Six females and one male identified as straight, one female identified as bisexual, and two males identified as gay. Participants came from a lower-

¹ Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Internal Review Board (IRB) at Texas A&M University to protect the rights and confidentiality of participants. Research ethics were carefully observed, and participants were informed of the purpose of the study and data collection methods, informed of any possible risks, and assured of their right to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time. To ensure that participants understood the above information they were given a letter outlining these factors and were asked to provide written consent prior to participation in the study.

to-upper middle class background, and all but two were raised and educated in Texas (the state in which the study was conducted).

Interviews

Data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with each participant, each lasting approximately 45 minutes. Participants were asked to recall their past sexual experiences, especially as they related to sexual pleasure and engaging in sexual activity for that purpose. Each participant was given a \$20 gift card for participation, including participants whose interview data is not represented in this article due to loss of data or failure to meet the criteria.

Interviews were audio recorded for transcription purposes except in the event that participants did not consent to recording. Extensive notes were also taken throughout the interview, which were reviewed as part of the data analysis.

Interview Guide

A general open-ended interview approach was utilized to ensure that all research questions were addressed during participant interviews (Patton, 2002). The general interview guide (Appendix A) outlines a set of issues delineated from the research questions and the literature. These were explored with each participant and were developed prior to participant interviews. Interviews began by asking general questions about sexual discourse and personal sexual beliefs (including topics such as recreation and recreational sex) and evolved into discussions of particular memories and experiences. This allowed researchers to identify beliefs and contexts of recreational sex and also, through anecdotes, to analyze actions related to pleasure and desire

The formulation of interview questions was guided by several sources. Paul and Hayes (2002) asked college students to describe a typical hook-up script by asking about the particular circumstances surrounding some memorable sexual experiences. Based on this structure the interview guide includes questions regarding a positive recreational sexual encounter a participant might have experienced. The interview guide also includes questions regarding specific activities within the realm of the participants' previous sexual experiences to discern which experiences evoked the strongest memories of pleasure (Bay-Cheng, Robinson & Zucker, 2009).

Because interviews discussed past sexual experiences, questions were formulated based on similar studies using reminiscence methods (Bay-Cheng, Robinson & Zucker, 2009). According to Wong (1995), there are several sub-categories of reminiscence, some of which were used in this research project. These include integrative reminiscence (integration of the present and past), instrumental reminiscence (recalling past plans, problems, and difficulties), transmissive reminiscence (values and lessons from one's past), and narrative reminiscence (simple autobiographical sketches and anecdotes without moral attachments). Participants in this study were asked to reflect on and recollect memories and emotions from their adolescence in a semi-structured interview format based on Wong's (1995) sub-categories as well as definitions and statistics presented in the literature.

Given the inconsistencies regarding general definitions surrounding sexual activities and situations, participants were asked to describe why they believed a sexual encounter was a recreational experience and, for clarity, were asked to define recreation.

Participants were also asked to provide counter examples of experiences that might not have been purely recreational. These are similar to questions asked by Peterson and Muehlenhard (2007) who invited participants to describe encounters that might have been sexual in nature but did not connote “having sex.”

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data was conducted in an inductive method described by Bernard (2000), Glaser & Strauss (1967), Patton (2002), and Thomas (2003). Inductive analysis is the process of condensing raw sociological data (e.g., interviews) into summaries of themes discovered through analysis, connecting those themes with the research objectives, and then building subsequent themes on those connections (Thomas, 2003). Each semi-structured interview was transcribed and coded by line in order to discover themes present in the data (Patton, 2002; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Wolcott, 1994). Themes were then condensed into paragraphs of complete ideas (Wong, 1995) and connected back to the research objectives. Interpretation occurred throughout the coding process (Marshall and Rossman, 2006; Patton, 2002). Unlike a closed-coding system (or deductive analysis) where the codes and themes are usually pre-determined in order to test a hypothesis, this data was analyzed in an open-coding system (inductive analysis) which is typically used for exploratory phases of research (Bernard, 2000; Patton, 2002).

Steps were taken to increase the trustworthiness of the qualitative data (Patton, 2002; Bernard, 2000). These techniques include: 1) building rapport and trust through extended interaction; 2) prompting informants during the interview to illustrate and

expand on initial responses; 3) providing a sufficient time length to answer questions; and 4) having guiding questions that stem from the literature.

Results

During the data analysis process, participants' interview responses highlighted several themes, including *the relationship between the understanding of recreation and beliefs surrounding recreational sex, the role of pleasure in recreational sexual experiences, the role of emotion and connection with partner in pleasure*, the discussion of first sexual experiences, and the importance of contraception in every sexual experience. Many of these themes, while not originally thought to be part of a recreational sexual script, were topics broached by participants and were considered important for them to mention when discussing pleasure and sexual activity.

Recreation vs. Recreational Sex

During the in-depth interviews, participants were introduced to the concept of recreation by asking about their chosen hobbies and activities. They were asked if these activities could be considered recreational in nature and why, and they were then asked to define what recreation means to them. Many responses were what those in the recreation field would consider typical. Most participants responded with a form of “fun” or “something that is not work related.”

For example, Agnes said that recreation is “something you want to do, not because you have to. Because you want to have fun.” Similarly, Leah answered that, “school is the only thing that isn’t for fun. I need to make a living, so I should do this so I can reap the benefits. And besides that anything else is just for fun.” Similarly, Mandy

recounted her hobbies of reading and writing poetry as recreation because, “it was fun to me. I wasn’t forcing myself to do anything.”

These thoughts are similar to definitions of recreation by Nuelinger (1981) and Kelly (1996) who describe recreation as an activity chosen for its intrinsic value. Participants in this study emphasized that recreation was something chosen and not work-related and specifically noted that recreation could not be obligatory, thus fitting the above definitions.

In addition, several participants described relaxation or flow experiences when describing their recreational activities. Of her sketching hobby, Leah said, “when I work on sketches I’m not thinking about anything else, so I can literally just sketch and hours later I’ll be done and wonder where did the time go?”

This description offers an example of a flow experience described by Csikszentmihayli (1990) as one in which time passes without the participant being aware of that passage. In addition, participants made a clear distinction between ‘work’ and recreation which is seen as something enjoyable and without specific commitment.

In contrast when some participants spoke of recreational sex, it was less connected to the idea of recreation (as described above) or pleasure but was more connected to quantity of partners, planning, and relationship status. Common descriptions of recreational sex included phrases such as “sex with random people,” “no strings attached,” or “many partners.” In the research, these sexual situations are more consistent with “friends with benefits,” “hooking up,” and “casual sex.” Participants seemed to have trouble considering sex to be a recreational pursuit, perhaps because of

the lack of value perceived by society as described by Csikszentmihayli and Kleiber (1992). For many, recreational sex was seemingly synonymous with ‘casual sex’, implying that participants found the idea of sex for the sake of pleasure less obvious even when the objective of casual sex *was* pleasure. In instances where participants described recreational sex as sex for fun or pleasure in accordance with the above definitions there was still an element of non-commitment. For example, Sarah described recreational sex as:

Umm, you know. Sex without strings attached. No emotional connection, no emotional commitment. Um, no really concern for what like emotional processes are going on inside your partner. Um. Really recreation is sex, is you know, sex to get your rocks off. Sex because it fun. Sex because it’s cool if you’re having sex. Because you know, it is cool and different and parents told you not to. And if your parents tell you not to, it’s so cool to do it.

Similarly, Robert focused on the lack of attachment to a partner by saying that recreational sex he “would just mean hook-ups and sex for fun. No sense of attachment.”

Despite the focus on multiple partners or lack of attachment to partners, many participants reaffirmed fun and pleasure when speaking of recreational sex. Gabrielle said that, “recreational sex is something you do for fun because you feel like doing it, you feel an urge to do it.” Elizabeth, 19, defined recreational sex as sexual activity purely for the “debauchery. I’m sure that people do it because it makes them feel better about themselves so they’re not so stressed out. So, yeah, I think recreational sex is purely about enjoyment, just like I can say the same thing about books.”

Much of this contrasts with recreation researchers who contend that sex for the sake of pleasure is, in fact a recreational activity that can lead to satisfaction and renewal (Kelly and Freysinger, 2000) or offer relaxation or a flow experience (Csikszentmihayli, 1990). When explicitly defining recreational sex, most participants were hesitant to connect these two ideas.

'Going for the Gold' – The Importance of Pleasure

Despite participant hesitance to define recreational sex in terms of other more traditional recreational activities, most participants (either explicitly or implicitly) conveyed that sexual pleasure was important when defining a sexual experience as recreational. When asked to describe a recreational sexual experience or recall a particularly recreational sexual moment, most participants placed emphasis on pleasure rather than on the relationship status between themselves and their partners. As Gabrielle, 21, noted, “you’re always going for the gold.” When questioned further, she said “climax,” meaning orgasm. This sentiment guided the activity choices of participants in the same way that those engaging in more traditional recreational activities would. Some participants were wary of activities that had been painful in past experiences, and many avoided activities which did not have the immediate benefit of pleasure. This is a key distinction between recreational sexual activity and other sexual contexts in which a partner might engage in an activity for the sake of *the other person*. Rather, participants were very clear that their own pleasure was paramount in activity choice. Sarah, 21, described her most pleasurable moments during high school as masturbation with a shower head. She said:

Like I masturbated a lot and none of my friends did. And when they found out I did, it was really weird for them and I was like guys this is a lot more health uh this is a lot healthier than letting some guy spelunk down there who doesn't know what he is doing, you know. And it hurts a lot less because some guys just really don't know what they are doing.

As a teen, Hannah was a part of many relationships and engaged in many sexual activities for pleasure; during these experiences there was a clear goal of sexual climax. Of her experience she said:

They all involved a lot of excitement and a little bit of, "am I doing this right?" And, some disappointment. Because again I didn't know what I was doing and I was disappointed in myself and if I didn't orgasm or if he didn't that was... disappointing.

Sexual climax was seen as the paramount of sexual experiences by many participants. Many could not vocalize why this was, but in general, the success of sexual encounters was based on if orgasm was reached by those participating (depending on the chosen activity). Pleasure is the most common factor for engaging in sexual activities (Meston & Buss, 2007), and although pleasure (not necessarily with climax) was important and pursued during recreational sexual activity, there was an emphasis on the goal of orgasm. This fits particularly well into the classification of sex as a recreational activity, particularly when considered in the context of explanations offered by Kelly and Freysinger (2000) who contend that adolescents can engage in sexual activity for its

own sake. In addition, Mannell and Kleiber (1997) offered the idea that pleasure is part of the leisure experience, something that has been well-described by participants.

‘Recreational and Intimate at the Same Time’ – The Role of Partners and Emotion

Although most participants focused on words such as ‘fun’ and ‘pleasure’ when describing their definitions of recreational sex, their anecdotes showed that partners concerned with their pleasure and emotional connection played a role in how pleasurable an experience was.

For Leah, pleasure was absolutely connected to her partner and her emotional connection to him. She said that after her first sexual experience:

He was 100% great about it and stopped and made me look him in the face and asked, “Are you OK? How do you feel? Do you not want me to do that again?”

And, so we talked about it after, which I really appreciated that he initiated a how are you?

Similarly, David described an experience with a friend. Although the experience was pleasurable, he attributed this to the connection he experienced with his partner. He said:

She didn’t come onto me or anything like that, but it came up in conversation of you know, I’m interested in you and having sex with you, and when we did it was very, it was, actually, it was recreational and intimate at the same time. I never really thought about it like that, but it was. We didn’t date, we were never exclusive in any way, but we were so comfortable with each other and we felt

like we knew each other, and so, I think the sex was very pleasurable for both of us because we both concentrated on the other person.

During his interview, Robert, a gay male, was very specific about knowing and trusting your partner as being essential to having a pleasurable experience. His definition of recreational sex was sex that was random and uncommitted. This echoes the common definitions of such sexual experiences as hooking up and friends-with-benefits.

However, when discussing sexual pleasure, Robert offered that recreational sex, as defined by him, was a problem because:

For me its kind of like, in a relationship I don't know I trust my partner more, so I don't have to think a lot more. I guess recreational sex for me was an issue because I didn't really know the person and that was a problem for me because I don't know what their motives are.

For Robert trust was an essential part of experiencing sexual pleasure. He needed to know that his partner concentrated on him and was concerned with his experience rather than simply his own.

The connection of thoughts such as these is discussed thoroughly in both the recreational literature as well as the sexual motivations literature. Comfort (1973) notes that intimacy is one reason that individuals might engage in sexual activity; similarly, love and feeling close to a partner were listed in studies by both Meston and Buss (2007) and Dawson, et. al. (2008) as reasons for engaging in sexual activity. Recreation researchers discuss similar interpersonal motivations for participation.

Skills, Experimentation, and Novelty

Many participants expressed the ideas of perfecting a skill, experimentation, and novelty as essential in making an experience pleasurable. Some wondered what skills others might prefer in a potential mate, and others described skill practice as necessary to attain sexual pleasure. Often, a situation described as pleasurable or a particularly recreational experience was one that “stuck out” in the memory of the participants because it was unusual or involved trying something new.

For many participants, the females in particular, the skills and knowledge possessed by their partners and themselves were often of high importance. When asked about a particularly pleasurable experience, Gabrielle described a date during which she and her partner were fondling each other and he performed oral sex on her. She said, “it was VERY pleasurable. He knew what he was doing. That’s what sticks out.” In contrast, she also described a time when her partner did not have the skills she desired, and thus, she did not consider the experience to be recreational. Of that experience, she said:

I felt like he didn’t know what he was doing. It seemed like he was a virgin. I asked him if he was and he wasn’t and he got offended. He didn’t know where, its like he pumped it up. Like you know how some guys are fingering you and you think oh this is going to be good, they say specific things like they know what they’re doing. And when it came down to it, he didn’t know where to put it, he couldn’t keep it up, it was just disappointment, and a waste of my time.

For this reason, Sarah noted, it is important to have sex with your partner before entering into a long-term commitment. Although she believes sex should be reserved for partners to whom you are somewhat emotionally connected, she also believes that “sex isn’t one of those things that you are immediately good at and it’s not immediately fulfilling.”

Because of this, she believes that it is reasonable to not only experience sexual activity and pleasure with partners prior to marriage but that it is essential to having a physically fulfilling sexual relationship with a partner. This echoes sentiments by Kleiber (1999) who discussed building skills and perfecting performance as a necessary component to enjoying a recreational experience.

In contrast, some participants spoke of activities that they did not wish to participate in due to lack of pleasure. Hannah said that unlike Sarah, she has not historically preferred masturbation because for her there is simply no pleasure. Similarly, when asked about a particularly recreational experience, Leah recalled a situation where herself and her partner were looking at various sexual positions on the internet and decided to try a few of them the next time they engaged in sexual activity. She said:

He started laughing and joking about trying out the position of the week. And, I was like no, what are you looking at. So I went over and he showed me and I was laughing so hard and was like, ok, click on it. So, he clicked on it and pulled up all these different positions. We were laughing so hard and were like, “how do you even DO that?” We were just cracking jokes and looking at them and then were like, ok, let’s pick some and try them. We ended up picking some and

trying them. So it was really funny because we were laughing and super awkward and couldn't do half of them. Some of them worked really well and we were like "ok, we can incorporate them at some point," and so I guess that would be a very recreational moment.

This indicates that participants value new experiences to continue their enjoyment of sexual activities. Additionally, many participants showed that they valued novel sexual experiences as recreational through their inclusion of anecdotes during the interviews. Ben, 19, often had trouble reconciling his personal beliefs with the idea of pleasurable sex that did not take place in the context of a relationship. However, when asked about a particularly recreational experience, he recounted a time when he was traveling with his family in China and paid for sexual services at a massage parlor. He said "I went to a massage parlor and I got a hand job. That's my little crazy story!"

When asked to clarify, he noted:

It was good. I had a good time, it was kind of, you go into a room. I don't want to say like a hotel because it wasn't like that, but like a massage spa kind of thing. So I got a massage and that happened and then we just went and sat on some couches in bathrobes and stuff.

Similarly, Hannah, who expressed that most of her experiences were exciting, shared a memory of an experience where she and her partner had been smoking marijuana. The novelty of the marijuana added to the sexual experience in a way that made it particularly memorable. She recalled:

It was a couple of months into the relationship when we were both really high. And we were both like, yeah, making out high is really fun! And then we were both like, what would having sex high be like? Would that be even better? So we were in his basement on the couch and parents could walk in at any moment. Which again was exciting because always the chance of getting caught was exciting. But, you know, it was because like our minds were altered and everything was slower. I don't know if you've been high before but everything is different. And it was really good in the moment but then we tried it again and it wasn't the same which was interesting. But it was the most fun we had.

This description shows the importance of novel experiences and is also consistent with Cooper (2002) and the CDC (2010) who assert that many teens who engage in sexual activity often do so in conjunction with drugs and alcohol. Although there was an immense amount of pleasure in this experience the first time, when Hannah and her partner attempted to recreate this experience, they both agreed that it was not as much 'fun' as the previous experience had been. This speaks to the excitement of new experiences and their role in recreation. After the first sexual encounter under the influence of marijuana, the experience was no longer as pleasurable.

First Sexual Experiences

Due to the time period that participants were discussing, many disclosed their feelings regarding their first sexual experiences. The anecdotes were varied; some remembered their first sexual encounter negatively, and some positively. Some participants described situations which could be classified as sexual assault or rape,

while others were eager to have a first sexual experience to mitigate stigma from their peers. Due to these differences in experiences, there was a varying degree of whether participants believed they had participated in a recreational experience or not.

Some participants did not view their first sexual encounter as positive due to either a lack of pleasure or because of a sexual assault. In addition, many had experiences which would be viewed as negative by others even though the participant viewed them in a different way than would be expected. Sarah recounted her experience losing her virginity in a date-rape situation. She said:

This guy that I was head over heels for, date raped me at the first high school party I ever went to... he handed me one of those red Solo cups and then I woke up with him on top of me. And in my mind, because I was so over the moon with this guy, I was like, okay I guess this means that we are together. Like we hadn't done anything physical except for make out, I was just like okay. And so you know, he finished, or whatever and I passed out and the next morning we woke up and we did it again. And I loved it. I was like oh god, this is so cool.

She later disclosed that her first sexual encounter enabled her to feel as though a milestone was past, and she no longer had to value her virginity. "It was just a thing," she said, and she later believed that her virginity had been a hurdle to sexual activity and after she was assaulted that hurdle was gone. She said that "after my virginity was gone, I had no fear." Similarly, sexual activity lost its mystique and importance for Elizabeth following a sexual assault. Prior to her first experience with intercourse, Elizabeth was not interested in sexual activity because of the importance given to it in her school. Yet,

after she was raped while intoxicated by someone she considered a friend (her first sexual experience), she felt that, “after that first time I was like, whatever, its not that important. I just didn’t have a very opinionated view on it at all anymore.” Elizabeth expressed that before her assault, she was indifferent toward the pursuit of sex because of the importance placed on sexual activity.. Once she was sexually assaulted, she was no longer merely indifferent and actively avoided sexual activity because her experience told her it was not pleasurable or fulfilling.

Gabrielle, on the other hand, was coerced into sexual activity by a friend who threatened to wake her parents if she did not have sex with him. However, this experience did not change her perception that sexual activity was pleasurable or desirable. She recounted:

I told him, I want to experience sex or whatever, and he said you wanna try? And I said yes. And he goes peek outside! And then that’s when I started reconsidering myself. I said maybe I don’t want to, it was probably one or two ‘o clock in the morning. He said, you’re gonna come outside or I’m going to wake up everyone in your household. So, I did.

Though many would consider this sexual coercion or assault, Gabrielle did not feel this way about her encounter. She noted that it was not pleasurable but also that she is still close friends with this man.

As briefly discussed above, many participants felt that the loss of virginity was a milestone and that this milestone was key to enjoying later sexual experiences. Robert felt as though his first sexual experience was a step into adulthood. He said, “I’m not

gonna lie, I felt like I was an adult afterwards, but I was kinda like, this is what people do? It was kind of, you know, I did feel like an adult.”

David had a similar sentiment to Sarah’s. Although he waited to have his first sexual experience, he felt a surge of self-confidence afterwards, and he was able to have more sexual experiences. He recounted, “she seemed like she was into me and I ran with it. And then, um, we only had sex maybe like 2 times, and I was like OK I’m done, I lost my virginity I can go conquer the world, I can go have sex with anybody.”

These responses indicate that perceived value judgment was a barrier to engaging in sexual activity as outlined by Csikszentmihayli and Kleiber (1992). Once participants experienced their first sexual encounter, they had already performed an act which could be met with possible disdain.

Contraceptives as Part of a Sexual Script

Although the interview did not specifically ask about contraceptive practices, it is a topic that participants discussed openly and without provocation. This shows that contraception is a regular part of both sexual scripts of teenagers and part of sexual discourse when discussing sexual activity that does not have procreation as its goal. Most participants expressed that any sexual encounter not within a monogamous relationship and not for the purpose of procreation should include methods of hormonal birth control or barrier contraception. Despite this, participants were generally vocal about not having used any form of contraception. Some listed parents as a barrier to obtaining contraception, some listed not having it “in the moment,” and others simply

did not think about using it despite knowing the risks of pregnancy and STIs. Leah said that:

Because of my mom, I couldn't get anything, and so we did not practice safe sex, and that's one thing that now... No birth control, no condoms, no nothing, and so thinking back I am the luckiest girl in the world, and knowing everything that I have studied now, I basically have a heart attack every time I think about it.

Seriously, I am like zero-point-something percent and I realize that.

She continued to explain that with her background in health as a course of study, she wishes that she would have known about the critical role contraception plays in sexual encounters. She places a value on knowing about various contraception methods and would no longer consider a sexual encounter without some documented form of birth control. Similarly, Gabrielle noted that she did not use contraception in high school, even though she thought that it was an essential part of sexual activity. She says, "in high school I felt like it was needed. It was scary, the possibility that I could end up pregnant if it was happening. But, I guess I just went with the flow, and just hoped that I wasn't pregnant." In that same line of questioning, she noted that, "I guess it was in the moment, or he didn't, you know when you're in the moment sometimes it just doesn't go as planned. You might say you want a condom now but we were so bad right now, you just slide it in and it's too late."

Gabrielle also stated that now she would never engage in sexual intercourse without a condom because she contracted an STI from one of her sexual partners. Her attitude is similar to that expressed by Robert who said:

I don't know how to explain it, but it seems like things happen so quickly in those moments that you really don't think. I wish there was a way there was a way to get people to think more, especially with condoms and those types of situations, just really. 'Cuz it would, if you think about the whole pleasure aspect, you don't really want to mess up the mood, I had to really sort of get out of that fantasy moment.

Throughout his interview, Robert expressed that contraception is highly important in a sexual encounter and also expressed that often pleasure takes precedence over planning to use contraception. This, he felt, is something he wishes he would have thought of as a teenager and is something of which he wishes other teens were more cognizant.

Although contraception and similar safety measures are not inherently part of a recreational sexual encounter, its emergence during the interview process delineates it as something of importance to participants. None expressed gaining particular pleasure from the use of contraception or hormonal birth control; however, several expressed feeling safer or more at ease engaging in sexual behaviors having used contraception. This implies that although contraception in itself is not the cause of pleasure in a sexual encounter and is not necessary for recreational sex to occur, it often allows participants to enjoy the experience of a purely recreational encounter. It is possible that contraception adds an extra component of safety that allows for the pursuance of pleasure.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to document the perceptions of recreational sex and the contexts of recreational sexual experiences of teenagers. The emergent themes included contradictions between definitions of recreation and recreational sex, the role of pleasure in defining an experience as recreational, the role of emotional connection and attachment in sexual pleasure, the discussion of first sexual experiences, and the importance of contraception in every sexual experience.

Definitions of Recreation and Recreational Sex

Although this study provided a specific definition of recreational sex, there was not much agreement by participants on their own definition of that term. Some agreed with the provided definition while others were not sure about the inclusion of non-intercourse or non-partnered activities. It seems that the confusion surrounding sexual definitions also reaches into the discussion regarding recreational sex versus recreation. This has long been a point of issue among recreation and leisure researchers who have endeavored to ascertain the difference between what the general public views as recreational activity and what scholars describe as such. Then, even scholars disagree on what they believe an appropriate definition is.

By some standards, all participants described recreation in terms familiar to this field. This is in contrast with the way participants described recreational sexual activity. As noted above, many participants, if not most, factored in number of partners, amount of conscious planning, and other similar criteria for the definition of recreational sex. Interestingly, when asked to describe recreational sexual experiences participants almost

always included a romantic partnership that had at its purpose more than simple procreation or partner satisfaction.

Stressing 'Fun' and 'Pleasure'

In addition to having recreational sex in partnered situations, many participants stressed fun and pleasure when sharing their anecdotes despite not mentioning this when asked to define recreational sex themselves. Traditionally, sexuality and sexual behavior have been regarded as taking place under explicitly defined circumstances such as in the context of a marriage for the purpose of procreation (Bullough, 1994; Francoeur, 2001). If sexual activity does not take place in the context of marriage, it should at least take place in the context of a monogamous, heterosexual relationship. The narrowness of these contexts implies that sex is not included in the repertoire of activities generally considered recreational, such as tennis, hiking, or knitting.

For most participants, pleasure plays an important role in identifying a sexual encounter as a *recreational* sexual encounter. What constitutes a pleasurable encounter is often open to interpretation based on the expectations and attitudes that each participant possesses. There are several possibilities for the difference in sexual attitudes and the interpretation of pleasure. The prevailing thought among participants is that orgasm or sexual climax is a primary goal when discussing sexual pleasure. This is a common thought that is promoted by magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and film or television productions. Humans are portrayed as innately sexual beings who are capable of climax on a moment's notice, and scenes that contain sexual activity often last a short amount of time. Although many experts advocate for experiencing pleasure during

sexual activity just for the sake of learning new sensations, most teenagers do not think about pleasure in this context.

Emotional Context

Despite the importance of pleasure on its own, some participants also indicated that emotional context was important to receiving pleasure, specifically in regards to romantic relationships. Several participants expressed that they did not get pleasure from a sexual activity unless they were with a partner or in a romantic relationship. In addition, some participants believed that recreational sex could be described as sexual activity that did not take place with a romantic partner. Although the definition of recreational sex used in this study focuses on pleasure, some participants disagreed saying that recreational sex is casual sex or sex without any commitment to the sexual partner. In this way, these participants place more value on the circumstances of the act rather than the sensations or the activities themselves. For sexual activity, however, participants did not focus on how recreation might apply to sexual situations but rather focused on more well known sexual situations such as friends with benefits, hooking up, and romantic partnerships. This is due, in part, to the way media and society focus attention on sexual partnerships and how society, especially sex education and the school system, approaches the topic of sexual partnerships. The Texas Education Code states that abstinence until heterosexual marriage followed by sexual activity within such a marriage is the normal expectation for sexual activity (Wiley, Wilson & Valentine, 2009). In addition, the locale in which this study was conducted is known for its conservative religious values, particularly with regards to the value of “purity.” Thus, the

messages that youth and teens receive regarding sexual activity are loaded with value judgments in a way that many other recreational activities are not. Sexual activity is only seen as acceptable under extremely limited circumstances, and to derive enjoyment out of the process, participants needed to be in situations which mimicked those circumstances.

Contraception

One surprising, and somewhat contradictory finding of this study was the widespread agreement on the use of contraception when engaging in sexual activity. Many participants noted that they did not use these methods during their teenage years, yet they wish they had done so. Some participants mentioned that they felt lucky for not having contracted STIs or becoming pregnant (or impregnating others). Because of this, most participants expressed how integral contraception is to their current sexual experience with many going so far as to say they would not engage in sexual activity unless some contraceptive method were present.

Some participants when asked their thoughts on contraception said that they did not use it because it might interfere with pleasure or because things “just happened.” These suggest two different influences on teenage sexual activity. Stopping sexual encounters in the middle of pleasurable activity requires that each partner is confident enough to halt the activity long enough to employ some method of contraception, that each partner has the ability to resume pleasurable activities and current states of arousal, and that neither partner would be upset by such an action. Because teen sexual encounters may lack this confidence and comfort level, it is possible that teens felt

pressured by their partners to continue the activity without stopping to put contraception in place. This, combined with the many inaccurate beliefs that teens may have about how and when one can get pregnant or contract an STI and the risk-taking tendencies displayed by teens, illustrates why many teens may not use contraception during sexual activity.

The other answer prevalent among participants, and not always specifically with regards to contraception (although that certainly plays a role in this discussion), is the script of “it just happened” or “one thing led to another.” This illustrates that not only do situations escalate faster than many people expect will, but also teens (even as later adults) feel uncomfortable taking credit for the choice to experience sexual pleasure. Authors such as Tolman (2005) have explored this concept, particularly with regards to teenage women, and have suggested that the pressure from society to conform to a specific sexual ideal leads teenagers to take themselves out of a situation which required their conscious decision-making by using language which suggests that the situation had little to do with them. Instead of accepting their desire for pleasure and taking responsibility for acting on those desires, teens often place responsibility in the hands of fate. Teens might feel pressure to pretend that sexual activity is less pleasurable than it is to conform to a larger discourse that shuns teen sexual activity especially for pleasure.

Limitations

Although this study discussed recreational sexual experiences with participants from a variety of backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and sexual orientations, the data cannot be considered a representative sample of the United States regarding recreational

sex. Participants participated in this study through self-selection, and thus, our participants represent a segment of the population that engaged in sexual activity for pleasure. It is probable that discussion of this topic with those who have not engaged in what they would consider recreational sex would yield different results.

Despite a lack of focus among researchers on sexual attitudes and behavior of a heterosexual population, participants mostly focused on this aspect of sexual behavior. More research is needed to distinguish differences, if they exist, between the continuum of sexual orientations, race, religion, ethnicity, and other delineating characteristics.

There are also a number of limitations inherent to sex research. Although our participants chose themselves for participation, there is still the possibility that some information was not disclosed due to embarrassment or fear of reprisals (Catania, Chitwood, Gibson, & Coates, 1990; Moore & Rosenthal, 1993). Moreover, because we asked participants to recall experiences from the past, it is possible that details and memories were lost. Often, participants would describe recent experiences rather than those which happened during their teenage years, and researchers had to balance the interviews by helping participants return to the past to answer questions.

Conclusion

This study focuses on understanding the attitude, feelings, and concepts regarding recreational sex in adolescents. Recreational sex is a term that is hard for many to interpret and correlate with more traditional recreational activities. However, stories and anecdotes connect recreational sex to pleasurable experiences which seem to be connected to comfort and emotional attachment to sexual partners. The evidence

suggests that such experiences *can* be considered recreational experiences. Participants often chose sexual activity for its own sake and for the pleasure associated with sexual activity. First sexual experiences and use of contraception also play a role in defining a recreational sexual experience and often influence future experiences.

Avenues for Future Sex Research

As noted above, this study provides valuable information regarding how teenagers view sexual pleasure, sexual activity, and recreation. Future statistical sampling specifically designed to understand teenage and adult views and experiences with sexual pleasure, particularly as they relate to recreation and leisure would be informative. In addition, it might be useful for sex researchers to utilize the recreation and leisure literature when discussing sexual activity. Although many participants had trouble discussing the two topics as similar ideas, much of the anecdotal evidence shows that sexual activity engaged in for pleasure fits many definitions of recreation as described by noted recreation researchers. It would be worthwhile to pursue lines of inquiry within this field including topics such as gender, pleasure, and serious leisure.

In particular, Ingham (2005) notes the absence of a body of research discussing masturbation as a sexual activity unto itself. By its very nature, masturbation has as its goal pleasure for its own sake rather than for a partner's. As a topic for further research, masturbation would lend itself well to the concept of recreational sexual activity (Fuesinger, 1988). In fact, when studying adult sexual behaviors and attitudes, it might be worthwhile to pursue masturbation as recreation *before* inquiring about other forms of sexual activity simply because of the distinction it has in this regard.

Avenues for Future Recreation Research

Although many authors discussed in this paper give credence to the idea of sex as recreation, to the knowledge of the researcher there are currently no studies which explore this concept in depth. As I argue in this paper, some sexual activity *can be considered recreation*. When we consider that sex is considered an integral part of relationships and life, it begs the question why this avenue has not been explored further. Several avenues exist for exploration in recreation and leisure. Godbey (2008) describes sexual activity as play which applies in particular to teens who, almost by definition, are exploring their social landscape and understanding cultural norms. In addition, given that several other criteria of recreation are met (depending, of course, on the researcher), those who study recreation could make the argument for any number of sexual situations and activities to be considered as such.

Application for Youth Practitioners

As noted in the discussion section of this article it is crucial for youth practitioners to understand how youth discuss and understand sexual activity and sexual pleasure if they are to effectively program and plan for risk prevention. As discussed, many youth do not feel comfortable taking responsibility for their own sexual choices, whether those choices are made for pleasure or for other reasons. This discomfort inhibits their ability to protect themselves from pregnancy or contraction of STIs. While it is important for youth to understand the inherent risks that all sexually active individuals face, they should still feel as though they can make choices which best represent their goals and values. Youth practitioners can use the data found in this and

similar studies to understand those goals and values, especially given that sexual pleasure is important to some teens. It is counterproductive to discuss sexual activity and inherent risks while ignoring one fundamental reason that some teenagers partake in said activity.

In addition, sexual activity is often discussed as if teens do not understand the implications nor would they be ready to handle the consequences. However, practitioners often espouse youth agency and self-determination. Which is it? We cannot profess that teens are capable, intelligent, self-determined human beings and then fail to discuss sexual activity in the same manner as other activities which involve risk. Furthermore, if the goal is to prepare teens for adulthood, it is counterproductive to withhold information that would be applicable to teens when they reach adulthood.

CHAPTER III

'NO DECENT GIRL WOULD DO THAT:' A DISCUSSION OF GENDERED SEXUAL PLEASURE

There has been much discussion in recent years about the differences in sexual activities and attitudes between men and women. In some bookstores one can find entire sections dedicated to figuring out what each gender desires during sexual activity and how they feel about certain activities and situations. Similarly, there have been an increasing number of studies which discuss and compare sexual encounters and attitudes between males and females aged from teenagers to young adults (Galinsky & Sonenstein, 2011). In addition, other studies discuss from whom each gender receives the greatest amount of feedback and which messages they receive (Epstein and Ward, 2008; Moore, Rosenthal & Flynn, 1991). On the other hand, very few studies discuss teenage desire for sexual pleasure as part of this narrative, and those that do often focus solely on female participants. In contrast, this study discusses teenage sexual pleasure and the gendered meanings of sexual desire and pleasure among teens.

Literature Review

Messages About Sexual Expectations

As noted by Jessor (1991) and Epstein and Ward (2008), teenage sexual relationships are complex issues, and “human sexuality and sexual learning encompass much more than [biology or sexual risks], and include understanding of sexual emotions, fears, fantasies, pleasures and dysfunctions” (p 116). Epstein and Ward (2008) note that

although teenage boys did acquire stereotypical sexual information and attitudes from their parents, they were more likely to gain this information from the media first, then peers, then parents. Similarly, Moore and Rosenthal (1991) found that when parents do offer information and attitudes, it is generally disapproving, much more so for their daughters than their sons.

Interestingly Sennott and Mollborn (2011) recently found that college-bound teenagers facing the decision of whether or not to engage in sexual activity were more likely to describe the views and experiences of peers and parents as similar to their own. Teens who were virgins were more likely to describe their peers and themselves as unready for sex, while sexually active teens were more likely to describe themselves and their friends as careful. This suggests that peers not only play an important role in sexual decision-making but also that teens tend to surround themselves with like-minded peers. If the peer group begins engaging in sexual activity, members of the group might be more influenced to do so.

According to Carpenter (1998), sexual scripts present in teen magazines marketed to females place sexuality into four categories of discourse: violence, victimization, desire, and personal morality. In her study, Carpenter found that over the course of twenty years (1974-1994) *Seventeen* magazine shifted its focus from victimization and violence (sex is something for which males are aggressive, but females would rather, *and should rather*, avoid) to desire. Although there was always an undertone of personal morality (i.e. promotion of abstinence or delaying sexual intercourse) present in articles, by 1994 editors and readers commented more on female

desire in a way which did not stigmatize said desire. This is important because Keller and Brown (2002) identified the media as a potentially effective way to promote healthy sexual practices and awareness and found that teens gain at least part of their sexual ideology from media messages. To better understand this idea, Steele (1999) conducted a study that focused on how teens synthesize information from various sources about sexuality and found that “the media is inextricably meshed with the contexts of teens’ everyday lives” (p. 340). This means that teens often model their behavior after and envision their future behaviors in the context of what they see depicted in media.

Gender Differences in Sexual Attitudes and Behavior

Although many studies cited in above sections mention gender in sexual experiences, the gender differences in experiences have not been explored. Given the varying social contexts and expectations of males versus females, there should be differing expectations and outcomes for sexual experiences based on gender. For example, Rosenthal, Moore, and Flynn (1991) found that females were much more likely to be embarrassed when talking about sexual situations or when faced with scenes of physical intimacy (such as looking at nude photos or viewing pornography). Impett, Schoolar and Tolman (2006) found that girls who subscribed to the idea that women should remain quiet and unobtrusive were less likely to advocate for the use of contraception or to act on behalf of their own sexual desires. Additionally, girls who opened themselves up to criticism based on the objectification of their bodies were far less likely to “assert themselves during ongoing sexual activity” (p. 140). In addition, Hans, Gillen, and Akande, (2010) suggested that men were more likely than women to

define oral sex or stimulation as a sexual encounter due possibly to a female desire to not be perceived as sexually active.

Despite these findings, Paul and Hayes (2002) found that there was no substantial difference in the typical hook-up scenario between genders. McGuinty, Knox, and Zusman (2007) also found similar rates of involvement in friends with benefits scenarios between men and women; however, they also found that women tend to become more emotionally involved in those relationships while men remain more sexually focused. It is possible that the males who are sexually focused desire the physical pleasure that accompanies sexual encounters as well as the social status that may be gained by having been a party to sexual encounters. Similarly, Galinsky and Sonenstein (2011) recently discussed self-esteem, empathy, and autonomy as correlated with positive sexual experiences and found that all three associations were positive and statistically significant for women. For men, the positive correlations were not statistically significant. This suggests that women, despite popular depiction, can find pleasurable sexual activity to be empowering.

The research regarding casual sex and youth attitudes, particularly as they relate to female youth is somewhat contradictory. Herold and Mewhinney (1993) identified sex as an integral part of a fulfilling life but found that women are less accepting of casual sex and feel more guilt after engaging in casual sexual relations. The authors theorized this could be due to the socialization women receive regarding sex and also due to the dangers present for women in sexual relations that may not be present for men such as pregnancy, rape, or violence. Consistent with these findings, Grello, Welsh and Harper

(2006) identified an increase in depressive behaviors for college-aged women who engage in casual sex as compared to those who engage in sexual activity as part of a romantic relationship. On the other hand, many studies have found that while men are more likely to have casual sexual relations than women are, neither gender suffers adverse psychological effects from those relationships (Eisenberg, Ackard, Resnick, & Newmark-Szainer; 2009; Owen & Fincham, 2011).

Sexual Pleasure and Teenagers

Throughout the literature, there has been much discourse on the motivations behind teenage sexual behaviors, some of which focuses on pleasure and desire. Many authors have found that sexual desire and pleasure are motivators in seeking sexual activity (Dawson, et. al., 2008; Meston & Buss, 2007; Regan & Dryer, 1999). However, many of these studies discussed adult sexual behaviors which have some limitations when generalized to teens. According to Giedd (2009), the adolescent brain mimics that of adults in the area related to pleasure-seeking and that of children in the area related to motivation. Thus, teens experience pleasure as adults but seek it in ways similar to children. This might be due to the lack of development in the frontal lobes, an area that regulates impulses, decision-making, and other emotions. In fact, White (2005) noted that “there is a long lag between when adolescents first feel compelled to take risks and seek novelty, and the time when the frontal lobes” (p. 6) are fully developed. In addition, certain brain developments show that teens may not be making rational choices, and long-term goals might suffer in favor of short-term goals and maximization of immediate pleasure (Reyna & Farley, 2006).

Despite this, it is still fairly uncommon to discuss teenage sexual pleasure. Bay-Cheng (2003), Ingham (2005) and others noted that this is due in large part to sex education received in schools which focuses on fear and perceived morality. In particular, women are taught that purity, or virginity, is the only way to become successful, and some young women are taught that their lives depend on not becoming sexually active before marriage (Valenti, 2009). Until recently, sexual activity has been seen as a means to an end, a way to procreate and further the human race (Bullough, 1994; Francoeur, 2001; Luker, 1996). Now, however, sexual activity for its own sake is being discussed as a reality for teenagers (Kelly, 1996).

Methodology

This study investigates the central research objective of documenting gendered meanings surrounding teenage sexual pleasure and was conducted to better understand how teenagers and young adults define and understand how gender factors into teens' understanding of sexual pleasure. By understanding youth discourse regarding pleasure, desire, and sexual activity, particularly as it relates to gender and expected gendered sexual behavior, researchers and youth advocates have a basis for conducting future research and developing youth-centered sexuality education and programming.

While the literature includes some studies which have used qualitative methods in regards to teenage sexual attitudes and behavior, many use surveys or highly structured interviews to obtain data (Owen & Fincham, 2011). In contrast, participant attitudes and thoughts about sexual experience and pleasure were discovered using thought-provoking questions during a semi-structured interview. Participants were asked

to reminisce about their recreational sexual experiences and attitudes from their teenage years. This is similar to the method used by Bey-Cheng, Robinson & Zucker (2009). Specifically, several sub-categories of reminiscence identified by Wong (1995) were used to frame the questions in this study including integrative reminiscence (integration of the present and past), instrumental reminiscence (recalling past plans, problems, and difficulties), transmissive reminiscence (values and lessons from one's past), and narrative reminiscence (simple autobiographical sketches and anecdotes without moral attachments). These sub-categories were particularly relevant and useful for recollection of values and lessons, especially when put in the context of particular experiences.

Setting and Recruitment

Potential participants were initially contacted via class announcements, word-of-mouth and targeted e-mails to related undergraduate majors². Information about the study was presented to potential participants who were asked to contact researchers if a) they had experienced a recreational sexual encounter between the ages of 12 and 18, and b) were interested in participating in the study. Multiple avenues of contact were given so as to preserve participant confidentiality. Twelve participants, four males and eight females, contacted researchers and asked to continue participation after receiving copies of the study information sheet and consent form. One female interview was excluded

² In order to protect the rights and confidentiality of participants, permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Texas A&M University Internal Review Board (IRB). Prior to contribution in the study, participants were given information about the study, including the purpose of the study and data collection methods, any possible risks, and their rights as participants in a research study (including the ability to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time without penalty). To ensure that participants understood the above information participants were asked to provide written consent for their participation and were given a copy of the consent form.

because the participant did not experience a recreational sexual encounter before the age of 18 years, and one male interview was not able to be included because of a corrupt recording. All of those participants who were interviewed as part of this study were given \$20 gift cards in compensation for their time, including participants whose data was unable to be included in this study.

Remaining participants represented a variety of ages, backgrounds, ethnicities and religious beliefs. There were three self-identified Caucasians, three African Americans, one Asian, one Hispanic, one Mexican/Pakistani and one Caucasian/Vietnamese. One male identified as straight, and two males identified as gay. Out of seven female participants, six identified as straight and one as bisexual. Participants came from a lower to upper middle class background, and all but two were raised and educated in Texas. Although religious beliefs were not part of the interview guide, several participants cited religious affiliations including Christian, Buddhist, and Atheist.

For transcription purposes, interviews were audio-recorded when possible; however, consent to audio recording was not required for participation in the study. Extensive notes were also taken throughout interviews, and these notes were reviewed as part of the data analysis. Although interview times varied for each participant, most interviews last around forty-five minutes to one hour.

The study was conducted in Texas in a city with a Tier 1 research university. This setting was chosen because of the young age demographic and the confidential recruiting atmosphere provided by the local university.

Interview Guide

A general open-ended interview approach was utilized to assure that all research questions were addressed during participant interviews (Patton, 2002). The general interview guide (Appendix A, developed prior to participant interview, outlines a set of issues delineated from both the literature and the research questions. Researchers began by discussing general sexual discourse and personal sexual beliefs during teenage years and progressed into the discussion of experiences and attitudes related to those feelings. These questions allowed researchers to analyze common discourse surrounding recreational sex and gendered sexual expectations as they related to personal experiences shared by participants.

Questions in the guide were informed by several sources. Based on methods used by Paul and Hayes (2002), participants were asked to describe a typical recreational sexual encounter and one which was particularly memorable. Bay-Cheng, Robinson, and Zucker (2009) informed questions relating to pleasure and desire in addition to specific activities within the realm of previous sexual experience. To clarify some contradictions and inconsistencies of terms such as sex, casual sex, and hooking up, participants were asked to provide their own definition of terms used during the interview. In addition, participants were asked to provide examples of both pleasurable and non-pleasurable experiences based on similar questions asked by Peterson and Muehlenhard (2007).

Data Analysis

After each interview was conducted, it was transcribed and coded (Patton, 2002). An inductive method similar to that described by Bernard (2000), Glaser & Strauss (1967), Patton (2002) and Thomas (2003) was used to discover themes in the transcribed text. The researcher coded each interview by line. Themes were then condensed into paragraphs of complete ideas (Wong, 1995) and connected back to the research objectives.

The steps taken to ensure the worthiness of the qualitative data (Bernard, 2000; Patton, 2002) included using guiding questions that stemmed from research objectives and the literature, giving participants ample time to answer questions, and building rapport with participants.

Results

Based on the data collected from semi-structured interviews, researchers identified several themes surrounding sexual pleasure and sexual activity. These themes are: 1) gendered standards for sexual activity and pleasure, particularly for females, 2) negative language used to discuss female sexual behavior and pleasure, and 3) female experience of sexual assault. When asked if behaviors or attitudes regarding sexual pleasure, or if their own sexual activities as teens would change if they had been the opposite gender, nearly every participant said “yes” or described feelings which indicate that there are gendered standards for sexual activity. Participants indicated that it was far more acceptable for males to engage in sexual activity, particularly out of the context of

a romantic relationship, and that it was not necessarily acceptable for females to engage in sexual activity for pleasure.

Participant beliefs regarding sexual activity were shaped by a variety of factors, including parental expectations and religious values. Stemming from these beliefs was language that indicated that sexual activity for teenage females is altogether unacceptable. In addition, many of the female participants expressed either explicitly or through anecdotes that they had been sexually assaulted during their teenage years.

'I Wanted to Be a Lady' – Gendered Standards for Sexual Activity

Throughout the interview process, data was collected that expresses a variety of views on gendered expectations of sexual activity. Participants were asked to recall their sexual attitudes and behaviors, and they were also asked if they would have changed their behaviors or had different attitudes if they would have been of the opposite sex. Overwhelmingly, participants answered positively; males believed that it must have been harder for females to negotiate the sexual landscape, particularly if they enjoyed sexual activity. Similarly, there were narratives from female participants that indicated that expectations were different for females than they were for males. Mandy, 24, explained that her family was fairly traditional in the sense that women were expected to not engage in much activity outside the home. Her parents, she said, were wary of even allowing her to spend time with males unescorted. She said,

I got really good at lying. I would tell [my mom] that I was hanging out at girls' houses, I could hang out at girls houses. I wasn't even allowed to hang out at guy's houses. Not even in the afternoon. I could NOT be there.

Later in the interview, she discussed her family's viewpoints on sexual expectations of males versus females. She noted that,

It was pretty sexually divided. Like, the guys in the family can pretty much do whatever they want. It's sort of the 'boys will be boys' mentality. But, the girls need to be pure and virginal, and learn how to maintain a home.

These statements indicate that her parents were worried about what could happen if she were alone with males. The assumption in her family was that females would not engage in sexual activities with each other. In addition, without males present, there would be zero chance of pregnancy and a lower chance of STI transmission.

The assumption that males were the driving force behind teenage sexual activity was present in many of the interviews. David, 23, a married professional who had many teenage sexual relationships discussed his desire as a teenager as related to female desire by saying that:

I think that if I would have had my sexual appetite as a female, I would have been in trouble...I just think that my willingness, and especially in the beginning just to have sex, to you know say I've had sex, or to experience it as a woman would have been maybe a little more traumatizing, I guess? Because my impression of women, especially young teenagers and their sexual experience, they tend to be more sacred.

David elaborated by noting that he also believes that his experiences would still have been primarily recreational in nature but would not have taken place out of the context of a relationship. This is consistent with the responses of many female

participants. When asked if her behaviors or attitudes would have changed if she were male, Sarah was introspective and related her feelings about her experiences to gendered expectations of sexuality. She believed that:

I wouldn't be questioning it so much, you know If I was a guy there would be a lot less internal reckoning. You know. I would be, I would just see it as something that I always wanted, and so something I would always be pursuing. And something I wouldn't worry about my motives for or any future repercussion. Like sex to me would be a means to an end verses like a means for self expression, self fulfillment, um self discovery.

This shows that for some females there is not only an expectation of particular behavior, but also there are associated feelings of uncertainty when acting upon sexual desires. For males this is seen as "normal," yet for females it is more problematic and associated with distress. For some, navigating both desires and societal expectations requires blending both into an acceptable situation. It was important to Hannah, 24, to engage in sexual activity in the context of a relationship because of examples she saw in the media and the discussions she had with her friends in her early teens. She viewed sex outside of a relationship as "slutty" and did not want others to see her this way. Yet, she recalled that the vast majority of her sexual experiences as a teen were for the sake of pleasure. As such, she always had sex in the context of a relationship even if that relationship was not romantic. She recounted:

I wanted to be a lady. And I think that's why I would prefer to fool around in a relationship, even though I really just kind of wanted to fool around to see what it

was like, but then there was the relationship aspect. Where it doesn't seem like you're a slut because you're in a relationship.

Similarly, Gabrielle, 21, specifically stated that if she were male, she would have "slept with everybody and their momma." She went on to describe how males currently have the leeway to have those sexual experiences and that "it's like they get props for it, but when we, when girls have sex like a guy they're considered a whore, they're considered a ho, you don't want, basically were a bad person."

Leah, 21, agreed that women are often portrayed badly if they engage in sexual activity and personally did not feel comfortable with the idea of sex outside of a relationship. As a teen, she only engaged in sexual activity with a romantic partner although she described several of those encounters in the context of pleasure. For Leah, it was important that her potential partners respected her and desired her for more than her value as a potential sex partner. She noted that:

I'd really prefer it to be in a relationship. And I am very much the girl that I would prefer that you respect who I am. Before you do anything. I still am that way. So if I were to meet someone now and he wanted to mess around right away, that would be a big turn off for me. I would be like, you don't know who I am or anything about me; I'm just a girl's body to you, and I don't appreciate that.

These views are corroborated by other participants speaking on expected sexual behavior of women versus men. Ben, 19, who identifies as gay, concluded that it is easier to have anonymous sex with men because "any decent girl isn't DTF (Down to

Fuck), doesn't mess around." He continued, in another part of the interview, to say that "girls aren't as horny as guys." These views indicate that women are often expected to not enjoy or desire sexual activity and that their value as "decent" human beings is tied into their chaste sexual behavior.

This is commensurate with the experience of Agnes, 19, who recalled that when she was in high school she "made out with some people and people thought I was a slut, but I got over it. I felt like I didn't need to feel bad for kissing people." Her peer group made sure that she knew that kissing someone with whom she was not involved was not considered normal teenage girl behavior.

Interestingly, when questioned about non-partnered activities such as masturbation, there was some speculation from female participants that this was also not acceptable behavior. Masturbation was seen as inherently sexual, and many participants described feeling weird for trying it or not remotely interested in it because by definition masturbation is done without a partner. Leah, who would like to be a health educator, acknowledged the potential health benefits of masturbation yet said that "it wouldn't feel right. I just feel like a guy should be doing those things and making me feel that way."

This is consistent with a study conducted by Ingham and van Zesson (1998) in which the majority of female participants discussed orgasm as something given to them by their male partner rather than something they individually sought. If they believe that male partners should be responsible for their sexual pleasure, women often will not seek pleasure for themselves and are not encouraged to have sexual self-efficacy.

The narratives uncovered in the interviews indicate that there is often a different standard for men and women, particularly during the teen years. There is the impression that women should be quiet about their sexual desires and even quieter about their sexual experiences. To be vocal about these beliefs and experiences risks being labeled as sexually promiscuous, a term with a negative connotation implying that women having sex outside the accepted norms of procreation are less worthy of respect.

Sluts, Whores, Hos, and Easy – The Role of Language in Sexual Discourse

When discussing the sexual roles of teenage males and females and particularly how the discourse was shaped within their groups of friends, participants often used negative terminology to describe female sexual behavior outside of a relationship. Similarly, it was often hard for participants to reconcile the idea of sex solely for the purpose of pleasure, regardless of the context of relationship, with female sexuality. Participants who were vocal in their acceptance of sexual pleasure for both genders often could not avoid using negative terminology and seemed to struggle with how to best objectively describe females who enjoyed sexual activity. David, who described many of his teenage sexual encounters as recreational and acknowledged that some of those experiences were due to forthright female partners recalled,

We tried to do the band thing, and so because of that I think the girls that surrounded themselves around us were typically a little more fast. You know they were a little more, I don't know what word I'm looking for. I don't want to say easy, but they were just tended to be a little more promiscuous is the best way to describe it.

During the interview he struggled to find alternate terminology to describe females who were engaged in sexual activity for the purpose of pleasure and desire. In contrast to this struggle with language, some participants were highly vocal in their beliefs about female sexual behaviors, even in the context of a relationship. Agnes, described a situation where a friend engaged in sexual activity with a boyfriend, and the boyfriend later ended the relationship. Of this, Agnes said that she “lost her virginity to a guy she knew since elementary school. And then he slept with 3 different people in a year. I joked with her, your life is ruined.”

This is consistent with other terminology used by some participants. The term “slut” is used to describe someone, particularly female, who has multiple sexual partners or engages in sexual activities that are considered taboo. Sarah mentioned having “ho” (a slang derivative of the word “whore”) points, as a way of cataloguing her own sexual experiences. She explained,

Ho points. You get 1 point for kissing for someone, 2 points for hand, 3 points for oral, 4 for sex, 5 for anal, 6 for a threesome, and 12 for adding a new definition to the urban dictionary.

Later in the interview, Sarah, who described her high school as a place where women pressured other women into having sex, mentioned that despite this environment, there were still lines you could cross and be considered a “slut.” For Sarah, any discussion of female sexual activity contained many words with negative connotations regardless of the intent of the conversation.

In addition, almost every participant mentioned “losing” their virginity. This suggests that virginity is something to be “taken” by another person and that it is something of value not to be lost or “given away.” Interestingly, this terminology was equally applied to and by both genders.. Several female participants discussed “stealing” virginity from their male partners who were hesitant in engaging in sexual activity.

'I Said Maybe I Don't Want To' – The Role of Sexual Assault

One startling commonality that many of the female participants shared was the experience of a sexual assault. Although participants did not always view these experiences as negative, they do illustrate the difference in situations that males and females must negotiate. For example Sarah recounted her first intercourse experience in a date-rape situation. She said,

This guy that I was head over heels for, date raped me at the first high school party I ever went to... he handed me one of those red Solo cups and then I woke up with him on top of me. And in my mind, because I was so over the moon with this guy, I was like, okay I guess this means that we are together. Like we hadn't done anything physical except for make out, I was just like okay. And so you know, he finished, or whatever and I passed out and the next morning we woke up and we did it again. And I loved it. I was like oh god, this is so cool.

She later disclosed that her first sexual encounter enabled her to feel as though a milestone was past, and she no longer had to value her virginity. “It was just a thing,” she said, and she later believed that her virginity was a hurdle to sexual activity and after her first sexual activity that hurdle was gone. She said, “after my virginity was gone, I

had no fear.” Similarly, Gabrielle was coerced into sexual activity by a friend who threatened to wake her parents if she did not have sex with him. She recounted:

I told him, I want to experience sex or whatever, and he said you wanna try? And I said yes. And he goes peek outside! And then that’s when I started reconsidering myself. I said maybe I don’t want to, it was probably one or two ‘o clock in the morning. He said, you’re gonna come outside or I’m going to wake up everyone in your household. So, I did.

Though many would consider this sexual coercion or assault, Gabrielle did not feel this way about her encounter and is still friends with this person. In addition she did not seem to understand the questions regarding how she remembered this experience.

In a similar situation Elizabeth described her first sexual experience as a friend “taking advantage” of her during her senior year of high school while she was intoxicated. For Elizabeth, this reinforced, at least at the beginning, that sexual activity was not pleasurable. She said, “that was the starting point of I don’t like this! Why do people keep doing this?”

In contrast to Sarah and Gabrielle, Hannah experienced sexual assault by someone acting as an authority figure, and she classified this as merely her first instance of experiencing “sexual abuse.” She recalled,

One day I wore a skirt, and I had to go drop off a form in his office, and I was alone. It was just down the hall from a class I was in, so I just dropped it off and I think that he slapped my butt. A little inappropriate for a teacher to do. And then at the hill in front of all the other, my other skiers, teammates, we were standing

in line for something. And I had my really big ski bag over my back so you couldn't really see what was going on but he grabbed my butt that time. And, um, he wouldn't really say many things, he would just touch. And they were always really quick, but they were always inappropriate even though they were quick. And he was newly married, had a baby on the way. And that didn't make me feel good, and I had to keep it a secret. I didn't know, I mean I knew it was wrong, but I never really processed it at that level. Um, I'm not sure why.

When asked why she felt she needed to keep these encounters a secret, Hannah replied:

So, I kept it, I didn't tell my teammates or anything because I didn't want them to be jealous that they weren't getting attention and I didn't want anyone to get into trouble. I mean, he just slapped my butt. Its not like he's asking me for sex or anything.

In each of these situations, not only did each participant experience sexual assault, but she neglected to tell authorities, either because she did not realize that she was experiencing sexual assault or because she did not view it as severe enough to warrant interference from authority figures.

In an interesting contribution to this discussion, Robert, who identifies as gay but had several girlfriends as a teenager, mentioned that these situations seem hard for females because,

As a guy you're in control of the situation. And, you know sometimes guys don't really listen, girls you know, they might not be able to read her, if she's

uncomfortable. And...if you don't really care about that partner you don't really care if they're comfortable or not so it might be rough for females. She might not be feelin' it and she might want him to stop or whatever and he doesn't really care. I dunno, it just seems like it would be hard for her in that sense.

Discussion

The research objective of this study was to explore gendered meanings of sexual pleasure among teenagers. Among the data collected, prevalent thoughts centered on differences between genders in specific sexual expectations, the language used to describe sexual experiences and situations, and the biased sexual experiences that females often must negotiate in the form of sexual assault. These themes suggest several larger ideas that are prevalent in teenage society. There are specific sexual standards for teenage women, and teenage men are not required to assist women in achieving those standards despite believing that those standards should be met.

Gender Expectations for Sexual Behavior

In particular, participants often described or named specifically the 'double standard' that applies to sexual activity. That is, women are expected to remain chaste until marriage (or at least until they are in an extremely serious relationship) and to be innocent of all sexual knowledge (Tolman, 2005). They are often valued on how well they maintain this standard in themselves and how well they maintain their innocent and virtuous image. On the other hand, teenage men often expect an extremely pleasurable sexual experience and expect their partners to be adventurous and ready to try new

sexual activities (Tolman, 2005). These two ideals are in direct contrast to each other; women are expected to dress the part of vixen but act the part of saint.

Almost every participant referenced a more complicated sexual landscape for teenage women than for teenage men. Many of the female participants expressed frustration at that the concept stating they were not free to make choices for their own pleasure; rather, they were encouraged by family, peers, and educators to fit into a certain sexual role. Sex outside the context of marriage or other t a committed relationship was never seen as acceptable, leading many female participants to hide their activities and sometimes not seek contraception or reproductive health services. This is a critical issue facing youth workers. If teens are not seeking contraceptive care because they fear judgment, then they face the inherent risks of sexual activity at a greater rate than teens who do not fear judgment or social repercussions. This risk can be even greater for female teens who bear the brunt of consequences for unexpected pregnancy and who seem to fear judgment for overt sexuality more than male teens.

The Role of Language

The differing sexual expectations that participants stressed for males versus females were often corroborated by participants' use of specific gender-biased language. Negative language was used almost exclusively to describe females who engaged in sexual activity either for the sake of pleasure or with multiple partners. The meaning here was clear: females who value sexual relationships are immoral and not socially acceptable.

Sexual Assault

In addition to describing particular normal behaviors expected of females related to sexual activity and sexual pleasure, many females described being sexually assaulted. Many did not explicitly state that they were assaulted, seeing the encounter as just another sexual experience. Others saw the experience as a positive one at the time and only later came to realize the significance of what happened. None of these assaults were reported to parents, school authorities, or police.

According to the Rape and Incest National Network (RAINN), this is not uncommon. An estimated 60% of sexual assaults are not reported in the United States, and approximately 44% of victims of sexual assault are under the age of 18 (RAINN, 2009). Participants in this study cited not realizing that something inappropriate had happened and not wanting to get someone into trouble with authority figures as reasons for not reporting their assaults. This indicates that teenage women in sexual situations are at greater risk of not only being assaulted but also believing that they have no recourse if an assault takes place. Public affirmation by groups such as Focus on the Family, which holds females responsible for teenage male sexual behavior, reinforces this notion (Valenti, 2009). Females, they say, are responsible for managing the sexual urges of their friends and romantic partners and for holding them accountable to remaining abstinent. There is much discourse denouncing victims of sexual assault, asserting that they were to blame for the situation. Perhaps if the victim were not promiscuous, protested more vocally or simply avoided people who might be sexually interested, then she would not have been raped. This is substantiated by proposed legislation which does not classify date rape (or sexual assault performed after a victim

is drugged and/or unconscious) as sexual assault because the victim did not vocally withdraw consent (HR Bill 3, 2010). RAINN (2009) noted that out of 16 perpetrators of sexual assault, 15 will not spend time in prison for their crimes. If legislators, the judicial system, and society advise women that they are to blame for their sexual assaults or that their assailants will not be held accountable, it is unsurprising that adolescent women would hesitate to report a sexual assault or would fail to recognize one when it occurred.

Limitations and Future Research

This goal of this study was to understand gendered sexual expectations of pleasure in the context of recreational sexual activity. In this study, gender was assumed to be a binary associated with biological sex. Although the researchers are and were aware of this problematic idea, participants most readily identified with this binary and were more easily able to discuss ideas based on it. The same potential limitation also occurred when discussing sexual behavior and sexual orientation with the participants. No standard of heterosexuality was mentioned, but many participants assumed this bias during the interview process and had trouble answering questions about gender due to this limitation. Future research could, and should, focus on definitions of gender, sexual orientation, and other problematically defined populations.

Although there were participants from many different backgrounds, sexual orientations, and ethnic groups, this cannot be considered a representative sample of teens in the United States. The data offers valuable thoughts regarding sexual pleasure, gender norms, and personal experiences, but it does not offer statistical rates of various sexual activities or attitudes regarding sexual pleasure. Though this is not a limitation, it

should be noted as an avenue for future research. Qualitative studies are helpful for providing context and situational data associated with sexual experiences, but to understand the feelings and beliefs of a large population, statistical analyses are needed.

Conclusion

The focus of this study was to understand the gendered meanings of teenage recreation sex and sexual pleasure. The data collected during the study suggest that recreational sex is subject to the same social norms and prejudices as any other sexual activity. Although participants could speak about particularly pleasurable experiences, there was often hesitation when speaking of those experiences or clarification of attitudes specifically regarding gender. Sex for the sake of pleasure was seen as problematic for teen women especially if those sexual experiences included multiple partners. Female participants discussed the expectation of sexually purity and the pressure to limit their sexual activities to their romantic partnerships. Seeking sexual pleasure for its own sake is not seen as acceptable. Negative language was often used to describe women who sought sexual pleasure, even if such women were not the topic of discussion. In addition, both male and female participants discussed sexual assault as a real risk for any woman engaging in sexual activity and particularly for those seeking pleasure.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand teen recreational sex, sexual pleasure, and the context and gendered meanings of recreational sex. The overall study had several aims:

- 1. To document the perceptions of sex as recreation among teenagers,*
- 2. To document contextual circumstances associated with recreational sex behavior among teenagers, and*
- 3. To document the gendered meanings of recreational sex practices.*

The first study (Manuscript #1) focused on defining recreational sex and on understanding context of sexual activity for pleasure. Findings indicated that there is difficulty reconciling the idea of sexual activity and pleasure with that of recreation and typical recreational activities. In addition, sexual pleasure was seen as paramount when discussing recreational sexual experiences, as were novelty and skill building. Interestingly, many participants discussed recreational sex while also discussing their first sexual experience (whether considered recreational or not) and contraception. Both of these were included in conversations by participants and were seen as relevant by them.

The second study (Manuscript #2) focuses on gendered meanings of sexual pleasure and recreational sexual activity. Findings show that there is a distinct narrative regarding specific sexual expectations for each gender, and specifically for females. Similarly, there was a particular negative language pattern among participants when

discussing female sexual activities, and in particular when said activities were undertaken with multiple partners or for pleasure. In addition, sexual assault or harassment were discussed as real risks for teen women with over half of the female participants having experienced some form of rape or harassment.

Limitations

Despite the valuable nature of this study, there are several limitations. Data was collected in a very purposeful way, meaning that participants had all had recreational sexual experiences during their teen years. This means that any person who had not had such an experience was excluded from the study and thus we do not have an accurate picture of the wider concept of recreational sex. This is also true because of the low number of participants who provided data. Although diverse, the participant group does not constitute a representative sample of the population of either the area in which the study was conducted, nor of the United States. In addition, there were several participants who self-identified as homosexual, and while this study made an effort to not assume a heterosexual bias, most of the data presented was from that standpoint. Specific research will be needed to identify differences, if any, in perceptions of recreational sex from differing sexual orientations.

In addition, it should be noted that although interviewers did discuss, in-depth, the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors of participants during their teenage years, it was often hard for participants to remember their thoughts and actions during that time. Thus, the resulting data gives a picture that might be different were interviewers able to speak

with those under the age of eighteen. Due to the logistical and consent issues involved with minor participants, this was not possible for this particular study.

Future Research and Application

Avenues for Sex Researchers

Based on the findings in this study several implications for sex researchers are presented:

- *Re-examination of the inclusion of “recreation” in sex research*

The findings from this study, in addition to contributions from the recreation literature, suggest the possibility of discussing the specific idea of recreation as it pertains to more traditional definitions of the subject. In the classic sense, recreation is used to ‘re-create’ oneself through various activities unrelated to obligation or responsibility. As found in this study, teens often cannot reconcile the idea of sexual activity as a recreational activity, and it would be beneficial to explore the attitudes and beliefs held by the general population regarding this concept.

- *Explore the language discourse surrounding recreational sex*

Further examination is needed on the role gender plays in the context of recreational sex. Participants use of language when discussing both recreational sex and gendered sexual pleasure show that discussion is often biased regarding the idea of sex for the sake of pleasure for women. It is particularly evident that this occurs when sexual activity takes place outside the context of a serious, monogamous relationship. For women, sexual pleasure for its own sake is not

always seen as acceptable, and participants often described judgement of themselves or of women seeking sexual pleasure. In examining the language discourse, it is important for researchers to understand whether we, ourselves, are limiting women in the way that we discuss sexual pleasure and sexual activity for the sake of pleasure. Furthermore, it is important for us to challenge the gendered expectations surrounding sexual pleasure.

- *Expand research focusing on female sexual scripts*

This study presented various complex meanings to recreational sex behaviors among women. The construction of past sexual experiences, negative and positive, suggests that recreational sex behaviors is not the same for all females. A diverse group of women is warranted to be able to gain a more complete understanding of the gendered nature of this phenomena. For example, the utilization of college students (a highly privileged group) cannot be generalized to the general populations.

Avenues for Recreation Researchers

In this thesis, it has been argued that sex can be and is often a form of recreation. Given this, recreation researchers have many avenues for future research.

- *Empirical examination of sex as recreation*

The concept of sex as recreation has not been explored via peer-reviewed research. Consequently, we do not have a clear understanding of how the general population views sex and sexual pleasure in regards to recreation. In order to gain a clear understanding of sexual activity and its role in recreation,

researchers need to understand the construct of recreational sex among the general population, and in which contexts sex can be seen as a recreational activity. Additionally, the inclusion of diverse groups (i.e., race/ethnicity groups, education levels, and socioeconomic levels) and participants with different sexual orientations (i.e., gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered) is warranted.

- *Inclusion of Sex on the Recreational activity spectrum*

Sexual activity is often described as an important aspect of a fulfilling life and satisfying relationships, something which recreation is often touted for facilitating, it is essential that researchers establish sexual activity's role, if there is one, in the spectrum of other recreational activities. This can be done in a variety of ways, including establishing constraints, understanding specific preferences and circumstances surrounding recreational sexual activity. Participants in this study suggest that safety and trust are important aspects in being able to enjoy sex as a recreational activity.

Application for Youth Practitioners

Several implications exist for those individuals that work with or behalf of youth within the field of youth development.

- *Reconnecting the role of youth agency with sexuality*

Establishing sexual activity as a recreational pursuit would give credence to the idea of particularly related to the concept of youth development and youth agency with regard to sexual activities. If sex is seen as deviant or risk-behavior, as has traditionally been the case, then as youth workers we are more likely to

discuss sexual activity in those terms. If, on the other hand, sex is discussed as an activity chosen by teens for specific reasons, we will discuss it in a way that does not assume a default of teens who do not engage in sexual activity.

- *Understanding the importance of sexual pleasure*

Currently, the youth paradigm concerns itself with the negative aspects of sexual activity. While those are important things to consider for anyone engaging in sexual activity, there is less focus on sexual pleasure and self-efficacy for adolescents growing into adulthood. Many practitioners discuss their preference for teen agency and self-determination. By not discussing sexual pleasure and focusing only on prevention and sexual risk, youth practitioners send the message that teens cannot be trusted with decisions related to sexuality, and thus, cannot be trusted to make adult decisions. This sends a conflicting message to youth. Addressing the role of pleasure in sexuality may be controversial but is essential based on the paradigm of positive youth development, to ensure that discussion of sexuality remain relevant to the youth culture of today.

- *Emphasizing the importance of sexual satisfaction*

As discussed in many points of this paper, sexual satisfaction is often identified as an important aspect of adult life. It is unrealistic to prepare youth for adult life by simply espousing the negative aspects of sexual activity. While it is important to not negate the potential consequences for said activity, and for anyone, teens and adults to know how to minimize their risks, we cannot expect teens to magically grow into adults who understand how to negotiate sexual situations

based on their own worldviews. Sexual desire is a loaded term in common discourse, and particularly within the media. It is important that youth are able to navigate these messages. In the same way that we teach and discuss other “adult” situations such as romantic relationships, alcohol use, and driving, we should discuss sexuality in the same frank manner.

Final Thoughts

Sexual activity and sexual pleasure are highly contextual, which make them difficult to quantify and explain. As evidenced by the data collected during this process, it is nearly impossible to generalize thoughts and feelings about sexual activity and sexual pleasure to a population. A qualitative method was particularly useful in this regard because it gave researchers the ability to clarify terminology and described situations.

In addition, it allowed researchers to better understand the many ways in which teens formulate their opinions on sexual behavior and pleasure, and how those beliefs translate into specific behaviors. It became clear that no one thing can predict teen sexual behavior, how teens handle sexual situations, and what messages they receive about sexual activity and pleasure. Some participants contradicted themselves and then had to re-think their answers to better articulate what they meant. What seemed simple in one memory was not simple in another, and many had issues explaining their intersection of beliefs.

It is important, then, to understand these complexities when discussing sexual activity with youth, and when discussing sexual activity as a recreational pursuit. Often,

what might have one meaning in one situation will have another meaning in a different situation. As researchers, it is important for us to know this, and as youth practitioners it is important for us to understand and effectively use this complexity to educate youth to become sexually aware and responsible.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction:

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself, what is your major, where are you from, etc. Where (city) did you go to high school?
2. Describe your social life and your hobbies while you were in high school. What groups did you most associate with?
3. Can you tell me a little bit about your hobbies? What do you do for fun? Why did you choose these activities?

Attitudes:

4. How do you define recreational sex?

(I will then define recreational sex according to the definition given for this study)

5. Do you agree with this definition? Why or why not? Would you have agreed with this definition as a teenager?
6. Can you talk about some sexual attitudes you have in high school? What led you to those attitudes? Do you feel the same way, now?
7. Are these typical of your own personal experiences?
8. On what do you base your interpretation of your sexual experiences?
9. Did you, at any time in high school wish you had different sexual habits?
20. Would this have changed if you were male/female?

Recreational Sex:

11. Can you describe some of your general sexual experiences? How did you feel about this at the time?
12. Can you tell me about any recreational sexual experiences you may have had?

13. Can you tell me about a positive recreational sexual experience? Was it purely recreational in nature? Was it part of a romantic relationship? Did it involve a partner, intercourse of any kind, genital touching of any kind.

14. Can you describe the events leading up to this experience? What influenced your decision to engage in this behavior?

15. What are your feelings regarding this particular experience?

16. Did you have other recreational sexual experiences? If so, did they follow this script? If not, can you describe other scenarios?

17. Were all of these experiences positive? If not, why?

18. Out of the experiences you have described, do any of them qualify as your most pleasurable? If not, can you describe that experience?

19. Would your experiences have changed if you were a different gender? If so, please describe how they would have changed.

20. Are your perceptions about your recreational sexual experiences different than your sexual experiences which were not recreational in nature?

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